TRANSCRIPT—GARY MCDANIEL

Interviewee: Gary McDaniel

Interviewer: Joe Newman

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Joe Newman: My name is Joe Newman and I'm here today with Gary McDaniel. He is a graduate of South French Broad High School and he was in the last freshman class to enter Stephens-Lee High School. We're in the old Stephens-Lee gym right now. Gary, you don't mind if I call you Gary?

Gary McDaniel: That's fine.

JN: And I'm Joe. When were you born? What was your birthdate?

GM: I was born in 1950. September, 1950.

JN: I've got you by about three years. I was born in 1947. I'm an old-timer. And where were you born?

GM: Asheville, North Carolina. Hometown boy.

JN: Where did you live when you went to South French Broad and Stephens-Lee?

GM: When I went to South French Broad and Stephens-Lee I stayed over on Bartlett Street in Asheville. B-A-R-T-L-E-T-T. Bartlett Street

JN: I know where that is. What were your parents' names?

GM: My parents' names were Etta McDaniel and my daddy was named Willett McDaniel.

JN: Where do you live now?

GM: I stay in West Asheville, off of Elkin Street.

JN: So you lived in Asheville all your life.

GM: That's correct.

JN: We're standing right now in front of a wall full of pictures of teachers from the 1964 Stephens-Lee yearbook. Zoe Rhine, who's the director of the history program at Pack Library put these biographical sketches together. Do you remember any of these teachers, either from seeing them the year you were here or some of them actually went to South French Broad.

GM: Yes, I do.

JN: Which ones do you remember?

GM: I remember Doc Lennon, in fact we're standing in room—as you entered—we're standing in the room which is the band room, where Dr. Lennon directed the band and where we did our band practice and I was very much a part of that in this room.

JN: What instrument did you play?

GM: I played the drums.

JN: Alright. I'll bet there was some beautiful music that went down in this room.

GM: Yes sir. I remember Mr. Lacy T. Haith. He was our Industrial Arts teacher in the room next door to the band room.

JN: He showed me that as we were walking down the hall a moment ago. What do you remember about Mr. Haith?

GM: Mr. Haith was one that would take his time to teach you how to do carpentry work, mechanical work. In other words, he was getting us lined up to have a career. ( ) at the same time. He loved the students and loved the obedience of the students. He saw the future and he directed you toward your future.

JN: I've heard that he was a pretty strong disciplinarian.

GM: ( ). In fact I'll tell you a little story. One time I was acting up in school and talking real smart, you know how teenagers are. Mr. Haith got very angry at me and he said, 'I'm going to tell your parents.' And my smart mouth said, 'Go ahead and tell my parents.' At that particular time, they could reprimand you a little bit, so he just popped me on the shoulder. But he said, 'I'm going to tell your parents,' and by the time I got home, he was sitting on my porch and he told my parents how I acted out.' Guess what, from that point on I never acted out again. I began to respect that sometimes he was serious. If he wasn't serious, he wouldn't have come by, but him being serious, that made me wake up and

say, ‘Hey, he cares about my future.’ He taught me a lot. Can I tell another story? Because of Mr. Haith, when I went to college, I went to Shaw University in Raleigh and I majored in Behavioral Science but I also had to take a course called Urban Science. I really didn’t want to take it because we had to go downtown, we had to look up plots, we had to look up property deeds and all that stuff. I didn’t like it and I said, ‘My major is Behavioral Science, why am I doing this?’ It was a combination of Behavioral Science, Sociology, and ( ). Well, when I came back to Asheville, the only job open at that particular time was with the Building Inspection Department. What Mr. Haith taught me allowed me to be a Building Inspector for the City of Asheville. I was the second Black Building Inspector for the City of Asheville but also the first Black Zoning Officer for the City of Asheville.

JN: Did you make a career out of it?

GM: Yes, I worked for the City of Asheville Planning Department for thirty-seven and a half years. I’m retired now but I worked there—but because of Mr. Haith gave me that first ( ) that kind of put me along the way and when I went to Raleigh and I began to take Urban Planning, then that kind of locked the two together. I never knew why but my future was already set. When I came back to the City of Asheville, I said to myself, ‘Now I know why I took Urban Planning.’ I took Behavioral Science, Sociology, but my mind was in Urban Planning and that’s what got me the job. And also, getting back to ( ) I was the first Black president of the North Carolina Association of ( ) and the first ( ).

JN: Now, I do want to come back to this, but it sounds like your background at Stephens-Lee and South French Broad and your university work prepared you for a integrated society. Even though you had been to segregated schools. You didn't feel held back?

GM: No, no at all. I didn't feel held back at all, because what they were teaching was the same things you could apply to life today. We had Mr. Haith, and then we had Miss Hall and she taught us Science. We had Gene Hammonds, he was sports. This guy right here was head coach, basketball, baseball. He was the head coach and because of him being the head coach, when I went to Shaw University, I really didn't want to play baseball, but I could, but when the coach found out that I played for him, I ended up playing baseball as a freshman. So, he opened up a door for me.

JN: ( ) that really paid off.

GM: Miss Vincent, she taught me how to type. By teaching me how to type, now I could get ( ). When I was at Shaw University, actually I could type but we had what you call ( ). She was very familiar with teaching me how to type. This was my English teacher, Miss Harrison. When we were out of line, she would say, 'I know your parents. I will go to your parents.'

JN: She looks like she ( ) any misbehavior.

GM: No, none whatsoever, and nice and lovely lady but she ( ). I didn't know it, but guess what? My future ( ).

JN: When you were at Stephens-Lee, would you have said you'd be a college graduate? Or that you were going to go to work in some vocation.

GM: I would be a college grad because my family was college oriented. My mother went to college and my father, so they pushed college.

JN: What did your parents do?

GM: My mother was a director of Parks and Recreation for the City of Asheville. My Dad worked out at the V.A. Hospital. So for me, college was not an option. 'You're going.' My brother, oldest brother, graduated from college and is a lawyer. In fact, ( ) and then he went to Philadelphia and he's a district attorney up there but he retired as assistant attorney general. He's got three kids that are lawyers. My brother Harry is an accountant. He worked for the City of Asheville and did everybody's payroll. With me, I worked in the Planning Department. But because our parents instituted in us to go to school, go to college, these people were very instrumental in that. This man here, Dusenberry, he taught us to have an interest in French. Many Blacks didn't know anything about French, but he taught us how to speak French. She taught us how to speak Spanish. Miss Eubanks. The man right here, every one of these individuals impacted our life. Lonnie Burton, when I first came back here—I didn't work for the City when I first came back, I worked for the ( ) Corporation—he's the one that gave me my break, because he knew me from high school and knew my work. He was like the Dean. This man right here, Vernon Cowan, he's the one that taught Math. He taught me how to do Algebra, how to do Statistics and things of that sort. I know all of them.

JN: Do you remember Miss Pierce, later became Miss Forney?

GM: Yes, Miss Forney. Miss Forney's husband, I was his pastor. I remember her and she demanded excellence from us and guess what? She was a lady of short stature but the

stature had nothing to do with her pushing you. She has a fire and love for the kids, a love for the people. She would push you to do your work. Why? Because she wanted you to have a future.

JN: They tell us that she was one of the strongest advocates when she got to Asheville High School. Newly integrated. That she went out of her way to tell people, 'We're going to make this work.'

GM: And guess what? It worked. Because she was persistent.

JN: So you're a minister now? What is your church?

GM: My church is Brown Temple C.M.E. Church, and that means Christian Methodist Episcopal Church. I have been pastoring for thirty years but I've been back at my whole church for seventeen. All these people over on this wall have impacted my life. Every last one of them. This lady right here, and these two—.

JN: They are married.

GM: All of them, at one point, impacted my life. This was the Guidance Counselor and she was the one, Miss Rumley, she was the one that looked at everybody and encouraged them to go to school, ( ) or if you wanted to go to a local or trade school, she wanted to match you up on where you should go. She was one the one to encourage you to further your education.

JN: Other than the teachers, and I'm impressed that you remember so many, what was your strongest positive memory of the year you had at Stephens-Lee and did that same kind of memory apply to the years at South French Broad?

GM: Well, yes, the memory that I'm dealing with is that how the camaraderie of everybody was tightly knit. We were like one big happy family, including the students versus the instructors. And that spilled over into South French Broad, even though we had white teachers and a white Principal, it didn't mean anything because they loved us just as much as our Black teachers or Black instructors and Principal.

JN: I know you didn't go to Asheville High School, do you think that the students who made the transition to Asheville High School had the same kind of positive feelings about camaraderie and "we're all on one team"?

GM: I can't say because I wasn't over there. I only listened, but I don't think they had, for the simple reason that we more a ( ) family, they were more into ( ), a new environment and that environment was mixed. Some liked it, some didn't, but I—we didn't have a lot of white students, but we had white teachers, so ( ). They had a mixture of both, of the white students and they had a mixture of white teachers. So some of the students were ( ) and some of them didn't.

JN: I'm sure it took some adjustment for everybody.

GM: It did, but I was more like, we're going to transfer from here to there, but with the same love and the same camaraderie. Everybody had different instructors but they were there and they began to love us, so I think that ( ) the love was greater than it could have

been over at ( ) at the time. But I can't say that because I didn't go there. I didn't actually go but I was more comfortable where I was at, plus I could walk to it from my house, so—

JN: Yes, on Bartlett Street you were real close.

GM: In fact, to tell you the truth, from Bartlett Street over here wasn't that far. I could walk over from here too. We caught a bus every now and then but our group was that we could get together and walk to school.

JN: Did your teachers discuss Civil Rights, did they discuss Black History, Civil Rights, what ( ) they thought with Dr. King on the scene?

GM: Yes, in fact, Dr. King died the year we graduated. But with Civil Rights and all that, the discussions came up and some of the discussions were about white teachers and what they were doing at the time is, we were basically just talking about the ( ) and it can't come up. We were educated about it, we were not ( ) about it, because those are the facts of life. You can't get away from the facts of life. But it teaches you how to live better in this world. It should be education. I put it this way. Look at you and I. You are white and I'm Black but guess what, we're breathing the same air. We eat the same food. We took some of the same whatever's out here, sickness, whatever. So really, the only difference is, is our skin color, but our souls should be the same. When you look at it that way, ( ) we were created—I don't know who you did—but we were created by the same person, the same whatever that ( ), my body was in your body. So there is no difference.

JN: We are the human race.

GM: Right. We are the human race. He created man and he created woman and so in that factor, to me that's no difference except skin color. So that's where I'm at. I love all people. And I come in contact with all kinds of people. But you know what? I look at them as being a creation from our master and I can't snub up my nose and turn you down because my situation is no better than yours. But it could be reversed. I could be down and you could be up. So hey, I don't look at you, I try to help you if you're down and encourage you along the way, but that's how I am.

JN: Let me ask you a couple more things. The interview is not for me, it's for you. I always have to hold back because I want to get in there and say—. We have a project of doing a timeline on Stephens-Lee. Some major events in the history of the school that would be included in some panels like that, but will be permanently affixed to the outside of the school. Can you think of any dates, or you don't have to remember a specific year, but any specific events that would be good to include on that timeline?

GM: The only event that was exciting to us would be when we had—and at that time we didn't have a lot of events going on—but the only event that I can say is when we all came together at one school and that was like when we had pep rallies and stuff like that. Those were exciting times and being a freshman just coming over, I was a new kid on the block and all these big kids were kind of looking up there. But as far as having any great events, the only events that I looked at was, when they had graduation, but give me an example of what you're—.

JN: You're talking, you're getting at what I was—.

GM: My major event was this: when I played in the band my freshman year, we really couldn't play at that particular time because of the learning process. My sophomore year was when we actually began playing. But, we had to be here, in this room to rehearse every day and also on Saturdays. Doc had us over here on Saturday morning rehearsing, getting us prepared for the next year. So when we did play, we knew what we were doing. My greatest event was that when we played, especially in our Christmas parade, they had to take the band and put the band after Santa Claus because if we came before him, then they were going to follow the band. That was a great event, that people would follow us and then we had certain areas downtown where we would stop and do our performance and we would pick them out and do our performance and then go on. But the greatest thing to me is that when we did that, people would follow the band and then—. Now from South French Broad—. From here, we would march from here to the stadium, down where the Tourists play behind that stadium. But then we left from here to go to South French Broad, we didn't have transportation like most of the schools did, busing the band in, we had to march from South French Broad all the way over to Memorial Stadium. But the biggest event was, as we got closer, we would be marching, marking time but marching and as we got closer, the majorette would hit that whistle and the drums would start playing and they'd say, 'Here they come.'They could here us coming.

JN: How many drummers did you have in the band?

GM: I've got to say seven. As we got closer, we were in one single line, when we started going through the gateway, through the doorway of the stadium, and the other band

would hear us and stop playing, just other what we were doing. We were one single line just coming in. And when we started coming in, the crowd began to cheer. The crowd would get to a roar, almost like a president or somebody coming in, they began to roar. And they would be focusing on the band and then the drum major would give us one signal and then we'd start playing fancy style marching band going to where I was ( ). To me, that was a great feeling, being a part of that and that people cheering us on and encouraging us to be the best band that we could be. And it all started with Doc Lennon. See, one thing about him, you could play but you had to read the music. You had to read the music because he wanted you to remember it but he wanted you to read and know what it is that you're playing. Not only that, I played in the concert band and I was particularly drawn to the concert band and the xylophone. ( ) in the percussion session, I could play it, all because of him on insisting. Didn't really want to, didn't really like to but you know what, coming here on Saturdays paid off. In this room. They divided the room off but in this room, from that wall to that wall, that big area except for this lot here. And the other great event, we had a store called Chisholms Store. Even though we would eat lunch here we would slip off campus to go down to Mr. Chisholms store and we would go down and get and get items and every student that went to the school. Then, you know the YMI? We would leave after school and go to the YMI and get us a cherry float and maybe they would cook a hamburger and put chili sauce on it. All of that resonates a bell in my mind of Stephens-Lee. I heard about Stephens-Lee but when I came to it and experienced it, everything I heard was true. A happy family. And we transferred that from here over to South French Broad.

JN: It sounds like there was a lot of caring.

GM: Yes there was, and it started with all of the instructors. It started with them and they were teaching us more than just writing. We could write, they were teaching us to care,, to love one another and then that spilled over.

JN: We could use more of that in schools today.

GM: They prepared us for life. Some of the things that they were preparing us for, I didn't understand, but now I do. I wouldn't have been doing the job that I did if it hadn't been for them.

JN: Thank you for your time and for doing the work you're doing upstairs.

END OF INTERVIEW.